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ABSTRACT

Utah's involvement with career ladders grew out of the nationwide educational reform movement. The plan was to improve learning by improving the quality of teachers. This could be done by retaining superior teachers, attracting higher quality recruits, and improving teachers' working conditions. In 1984 the Utah Legislature focused on performance-based merit pay and passed a bill authorizing $15,258,937 for district level career ladder plans. This paper studies four districts implementing such plans. Content analysis, on-site visits, interviews, and questionnaires were used to investigate factors influencing teacher acceptance of career ladder systems. Findings revealed teacher involvement, effective communication channels, administration involvement and support, and plan flexibility as positively related to teacher acceptance. Complexity, restrictive eligibility quotas, and increased responsibilities outside the classroom negatively affected teacher acceptance. Recommendations included provision of inservice information sessions explaining issues and options and exploration of smaller-scale, decentralized career ladder systems. Included are 2 tables, 23 references, and 2 appendices made up of the pilot school questionnaire and responses. (MLH)

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Career Ladders in Utah:

Four District Case Studies[1]

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Abstract

Case studies were conducted in four districts implementing career ladder plans in the state of Utah. Content analysis of plans, on-site visits, interviews and questionnaires were used to investigate factors associated with teacher acceptance of career ladder systems. Cross site analysis of the data revealed teacher involvement, proactive communication efforts, administrative involvement and support, and flexibility to be positively related to teacher acceptance. Complexity, restrictive quotas, and career ladder requirements that pulled teachers away from the classroom were negatively related to teacher acceptance. Recommendations included planned in-service efforts to make teachers knowledgeable about the issues and options available , and exploration of the possibility of smaller scale, decentralized career ladder systems.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In 1983 the same educational reform fever which was simmering nationally also developed in Utah. A number of key leaders and groups in the state helped focus public and political attention on the need to improve the schools through attempts to improve the teaching profession (Kauchak, 1984). Utah, a strongly Republican state, had been interested in the related ideas of merit pay for teachers and teacher-incentive plans since the early 1950s (Schmidt, 1984). In 1953 the legislation passed H.B. 11 which authorized funds for experimentation with compensation plans based on performance. Initially three districts were funded to experiment with merit pay plans; later two more were added. Each district was responsible for defining "good teaching," developing a system to measure it, and implementing that system to determine meritorious teachers.

Although funded until 1960, when the legislature failed to continue funding for it, the experimental merit pay project had several problems (Schmidt, 1984). The first was political; the legislature had not been kept well informed of the project's status. Probably a more fundamental problem was methodological; districts had neither the expertise nor resources to successfully differentiate between good and excellent teachers. High administrative costs were one symptom of this problem.

In 1984, the Utah legislature, fueled by a number of national and local reports again turned its attention to the idea of performance-based merit pay. In an analysis of the factors which contributed to the ultimate form of House Bill 110, researchers focused on forces both outside and within the state (Campbell et al, 1984).

Outside the state, probably the most influential force was the 1983 report of The National Committee on Excellence in Education entitled, A Nation at Risk. This report called attention to the low status of the teaching profession and problems involved in attracting and holding superior teachers. Among its many recommendations were that teachers' salaries should be increased, professionally competitive, and performance based.

Also instrumental in influencing the direction of career ladders in the state was a visit to the state by Governor Lamar Alexander from the state of Tennessee. This state had taken a leadership position in the creation of career ladders, and Alexander's visit to Utah helped channel reform fervor into concrete proposals for career ladders.

Proof for public interest in reform came from a public opinion poll published in August, 1983, in the Deseret News, one of the two largest papers in Utah. This poll indicated that 71 percent of the Utah citizenry either strongly favored or somewhat favored increasing taxes to improve the schools. This was in strong contrast to the 1970s when fiscally conservative voters turned down a number of school related tax referenda (Campbell et al, 1984). Newspaper editorials as well as commentaries on radio and television underscored the state's interest and commitment to some form of reform.

Probably the document most influential in translating this sentiment into concrete suggestions for career ladders was the Utah Education Reform Steering Committee's November 1983 publication Education in Utah: A Call to Action. Included in this report were a number of educational reforms including increased funding for higher education, scholarships for teachers in public education, productivity studies and 41.4 million dollars for career ladders (Campbell et al, 1984).

The career ladder recommendations in this report called for a state-vide system with four levels, beginning with initial certification and progressing through the 4th level of teacher leader. Criteria for progression through each level included the following:

performance + evaluation of knowledge of subject matter,

student achievement,

classroom management techniques,

experience,

level of education, and

assumption of extra responsibilities

There were salary increases called for, ranging from $16,000 to $17,855 for beginning teachers to $25,000 to $34,900 for teacher leaders. In addition to additional responsibilities, the option of a lengthened school contract year was also introduced, making the top salary for level four $43,600. It is significant that the final bill, H.B. 110, contained provisions for a lengthened contract year and additional responsibilities, in addition to the idea of revarding teachers for meritorious service.

Other agencies and people in the state influential in focusing public and legislative interest on career ladders included the Governor's office, a coalition of school district superintendents, college deans of education and state office of education personnel, the state Society of Superintendents, the School Board Association, and the State Office of Education. The only major non-education group opposing the bill was the Utah Tax Payers Association, which fought the bill because of the possibility of higher taxes (Campbell, et al, 1984).

Within the educational community, major opposition to the idea and ultimately to H.B. 110 came from the Utah Education Association. Their resistance centered around the following issues: 1) the linking of career ladders to merit pay, 2) the conceptual unclarity of the idea, 3) teacher resistance and 4) the lack of adequate evaluation techniques to place teachers on the ladder (Campbell et al, 1984). Though their resistance did not kill the bill, their pressure was instrumental in the insertion of a provision which would allow districts to allocate up to 50% of their career ladder funds for extended contract days for all teachers. The argument made by UEA in this regard was that all teachers in the state were deserving of increased compensation.

House Bill 110: The Utah Career Ladder Bill

The final document that emerged from the Utah legislature was a five page bill which in essence authorized $15,258,937 for district-based career ladder plans. The bill was to be administered by the State Office of Education and funded $866 per teacher in the state. (This was an average figure and ranged from $770 in one district to $912 in another.)

The authorization of the bill reads as follows:

> The legislature recognizes the importance of rewarding educators who strive to improve the quality of education, of providing incentives for educators employed by the public schools to continue to pursue excellence in education, of rewarding educators who demonstrate the achievement of excellence, and of properly compensating educators who assume additional educational responsibilities.
>
> In order to achieve these goals and to provide educators with increased opportunities for professional growth, school districts are authorized and encouraged to develop career ladder programs.

The key component of House Bill 110 was that the design, implementation and evaluation of the career ladders was to be a district rather than a state function. The reasons for this were probably as much political as pragmatic. From a political perspective, the state has a long history of decentralized district autonomy. Pragmatically, the task of designing a state-wide system which would accommodate all the diverse educational units in the state was immense (Utah's 40 school districts range in type from urban to rural and in size from one with 193 students and three schools to one with 62,129 students and 81 schools).

Other key components of the bill were that at least half of the career ladder funds were to be spent on career ladders (rather than extended teacher calendar days) and that the State Office of Education was responsible for the design and implementation of the career ladder standards.

Key standards developed by the State Office of Education included the following:

--Career ladder programs should be developed with cooperative action among teachers, parents, school administrators, and local school boards. Career ladder plans will not be accepted by the State Board unless documented evidence of this joint effort is submitted with the plan by the requesting local agency.

--Each local agency shall develop a procedure to evaluate teachers for placement and advancement on the career ladders, which shall:

a. Be fair, consistent, and valid according to generally accepted principles,

b. Incorporate clearly stated job descriptions,

c. Be in writing,

d. Involve teachers in the development of the evaluation instrument.

e. Inform the teacher beforehand in writing about all aspects of the evaluation procedure,

f. Specify the frequency with which evaluations will be made of teachers with less than three years of teaching experience and other teachers, and

g. Not preclude informal classroom observations.

--At least 50% of the career ladder funds shall be directed to advancement on career ladders, based on effective teaching performance, with student progress playing a significant role.

--Not more than 50% of each local agency's career ladder allocation shall be used for an extended contract year providing for additional, paid non-teaching days beyond the regular school year for curriculum development, inservice training, preparation, parent-teacher conferences.

--Funds allocated for career ladders are intended for certified instructional teaching personnel--those who render direct and personal services to and interact with students. The local district at its discretion may include certified media personnel, guidance personnel, social workers and psychologists in the program to the extent that their primary function is that of teaching. Excluded are instructional personnel such as interns, teacher aides, para-professionals, secretaries for teachers, and support personnel such as administrators, supervisors, attendance personnel, health services personnel, business officials, and non-certified media and guidance personnel.

Implementation

House Bill 110 was passed in January 20, 1984 on the last day of the legislative session. From there it went to the State Office of Education for implementation. Their guidelines required that districts requesting career ladders submit an operational plan by May 15, 1984. Under extenuating circumstances this deadline was extended but most districts submitted plans by the May 15 deadline.

A survey of superintendents during the planning process revealed considerable diversity with some common threads (Career Ladders Work Group, 1984). Most districts had formed a single committee to develop the plan and these committees consisted (in order of numbers) of teachers, parents, administrators and school board members. Most plans included provisions for

additional teacher responsibilities and extended work calendars. The major problem areas encountered by the planning committees had to do with evaluating teacher performance and ways of integrating student progress into these evaluations (a vaguely worded element of the bill that has been interpreted by districts in a multitude of ways).

(Utah State Office of Education, 1984, 1-2)

The diversity of these plans can be seen in an initial analysis shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. UTAH CAREER LADDER FEATURES

DISTRICT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Alpine	x		x					
Beaver	x	x					x	
Box Elder	x	x				x		
Cache			x					
Carbon	x						x	
Dagget	x							
Davis	x			x		x	x	
Duchesne								x
Emery			x	x		x	x	
Garfield	x							
Grand	x						x	
Granite	x			x	x		x	
Iron							x	x
Jordan	x	x						
Juab	x			x			x	
Kane	x							
Logan		x						
Millard	x			x		x		
Morgan		x				x	x	
Murray	x					x		
Nebo				x			x	
North Sanpete		x					x	
North Summit	x	x						
Ogden		x						
Park City		x	x		x		x	
Piute	x			x			x	
Provo				x	x		x	x
Rich	x	x				x	x	
Salt Lake			x	x				

San Juan	x					x	
Sevier	x						x
South Sanpete	x	x		x		x	
South Summit	x			x		x	
Tooele		x		x		x	
Uintah		x					x
Wasatch		x				x	
Washington				x		x	
Wayne		x					
Weber		x	x				
Uintah Basin		x					x
Sevier Valley	x	x				x	
Davis	x	x	x		x		x
Bridgerland	x			x		x	
Ogden/Weber			x	x			
Sch/Deaf/Blind	x	x				x	

COLUMN MEANINGS: 1.) Use of teacher/school/district/agency individual plans or projects. 2.) Use of merit increments for high performance in the classroom without additional responsibility. 3.) Use of teacher initiated portfolio for evaluation/advancement. 4.) Use of restrictive quotas at top level(s). 5.) Use of additional funds outside H.B. 110. 6.) Use of additional education for ladder advancement. 7.) Use of extended year beyond 4 days of assignment. 8.) Use of specific testing to measure student progress specified in plan.

Given the diversity of career ladder plans in Utah, a unique "experiment" existed in terms of learning about workable career ladder and teacher incentive structures and function. Because these plans were being implemented in the 1983-1984 school year in a variety of districts ranging from large urban to small rural, the Utah experiment offered a valuable and unique opportunity to study incentive structures in functioning career ladder systems. The need to study these systems at their onset was considerable. A major goal of this research was to analyze career ladder systems in Utah, and to identify variables critical to success.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to document development of different career ladders begun in Utah, and to draw ideas and problems from them which might contribute understanding to the development of teacher career ladder systems.

Research was conducted in four phases:

I. Phase One: Analysis of Plans

A content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980) of plans submitted to the Utah State Office of Education was used to identify key elements in career ladder plans. In addition, site visits and exploratory interviews were used to identify four representative districts for case studies. Selection criteria used included the following:

-incentive features,

-number and kinds of career ladder steps,

-use of peers and parents,

-teacher evaluation techniques,

-nature of additional teacher assignments,

-ranges of involvement in plan formulation,

-remuneration approaches, and

-participant satisfaction

II. Phase Two: Case Studies

Multi-phase case studies were used to investigate the implementation of the critical variables in target districts. Data were collected from different sources and different levels in the district to enable analysis described as "triangulation" by Denzen (1978).

Structured descriptive data were collected in the target districts. procedures included non-participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, and review of other locally available information such as early drafts and support documents. Analysis packets (Rist, 1980) provided the coordination of data gathering across sites.

The first set of district interviews targeted the central office, including the superintendent, if available, district office administrators, local teachers' organization officers and staff, representative parents, and community representatives. One interview focus was the political and organization contexts which influenced formation of the particular career ladder system. Another focus was the actual functioning of the system from the district level.

The second set of district interviews provided a closer look at several schools within each district. At the study schools, information was gathered from the principal, teachers' organization representatives, and teachers at various grade levels or subject areas. Particular individuals interviewed included successful and unsuccessful career ladder applicants, and non-applicants.

The teacher interview sample for the target districts is shown in Table 1.2.

District	Size	Number of Schools and of Teachers	Distinguishing Characteristics of Plan
Snow	Small	1 Elementary (9) 1 Middle School (10) 1 High School (7) 60 Teachers (26)*	Multiple Lines of Evidence in a Dossier System
Rural	Small	1 Elementary (8) 1 Middle School (7) 1 High School (8) 75 Teachers (23)	Job Enlargement with Some Aspects of Merit
Suburban	Large	District: 65 schools 2,700 Teachers Target Schools: 1 Elementary (14) 1 Middle School (14) 1 High School (12)	Decentralized Plans with Local Autonomy
Urban	Inter-mediate	16 Elementary (26) 5 Middle School (17) 3 High School (28) 550 Teachers (71)	Merit Focus with Self Nomination and Administrator Ratings

*Number of teachers interviewed.

Table 1.2
District Sampling Procedures

In addition, questionnaires were distributed in all districts except Urban. A copy of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

III. Phase Three: District Level Analysis

In this phase of the research, the development and implementation procedures and problems in each target district were described. Data gathered

through the district level case studies were analyzed and the structure and functioning of each district's career ladder plan was described.

IV. Phase Four: Cross-Site Analyses

Cross-site analyses focusing on similarities and differences among and between districts were conducted in this phase of the research. Emphasis here was placed on the identification of critical variables across and within sites that appeared to be related to successful career ladder functioning.

RESULTS

District Level Descriptions and Findings

Snow District

This district was a small suburban district with one elementary, one middle school and one high school and 60 teachers. This district can be described as moderately affluent with high parental support, a generally well-thought of staff and generally high morale. Early in the planning process, which was characterized by generally high teacher involvement, the planning committee rejected extra assignments for extra pay as a central thrust of the system. Instead, the district opted for a merit system with a lack of quotas. Central to the merit system were teacher-initiated dossiers which included the following lines of evidence: pupil reports, N.T.E. scores, pupil achievement scores, parent surveys, peer review of materials, principal reports and candidates' self statement. Each line of evidence was voluntary and controlled by the teacher.

Once compiled, each dossier was evaluated by a district-wide committee comprised of four teachers, two administrators and two community representatives. Forty-three of the sixty teachers in the district nominated themselves for a merit increase and forty of these forty-three were passed.

Interview and questionnaire data collected just after the merit selections were made revealed resistance to the career ladder system. Interview responses from 26 teachers focused on several themes. One was the adequacy of the information dissemination mechanisms. Though most of the teachers felt relatively well informed about the district's system, the majority of the teachers felt that the formal dissemination efforts were only fair/adequate to poor. Informal communication networks appeared important here. In addition, teachers were ambivalent to negative about the dossier system with 18 teachers either unsure or negative toward the idea that a dossier system adequately documented good teaching. Teachers also felt that the career ladder system had had negative effects on professional relationships within the district. When asked to suggest ways to improve the system the most often offered suggestions were to employ independent evaluators from outside the district and to develop more specific criteria for the evaluation of the dossiers.

Questionnaire data from 38 respondents indicated that respondents felt that the program discouraged cooperation, did not make the teaching profession more rewarding and had not improved instruction. A complete description of these responses can be found in Appendix B.

Urban District

This district was located in a major urban area in Utah with one of the larger minority populations in the state. Intermediate in size, the district employed 550 teachers and had 24 schools.

The prevailing philosophy in the district in the construction of their career ladder plan was a commitment toward merit. The upper administration interpreted the career ladder legislation in this manner and this orientation

was transmitted to the planning committee, the composition of which was heavily oriented away from teacher representation.

The planning committee produced a plan which had an extra service component but whose central focus was a merit system. In this merit system teachers could be self or peer-nominated. In either case subsequent information used in merit deliberations were not available to the candidate, nor were the names of candidates or ultimate recipients available to the public. The central determinant of merit was a principal teaching evaluation which was not shared with the candidate. Criteria used on the Likert-style evaluation form included classroom climate, respect for dignity of students, respected by other professionals and staff, providing evidence of appropriate student growth, willing to share teaching techniques, understanding of students, positive rapport with parents, student discipline and effective use of teaching techniques. Anonymous parent evaluations were also used.

Because of skewing toward the high end of the continuum, the principal evaluation became translated into a rank ordering from each school. A central evaluation committee at the district level then took individual school rankings and translated these into awards.

Responses from 71 teacher interviews revealed low teacher acceptance of the system with some hostile resistance. Negative reactions centered around the merit concept itself, the way that the concept was translated into practice, and the secrecy involved. There was considerable resistance to the idea of self-nomination and a majority of teachers at the elementary and high school levels felt ambivalent about the central role played by the principal in the evaluation process.

Resistance to the merit aspects of the plan appeared to be greatest at the high school level and lowest at the elementary level. In addition, the interviews revealed considerable amounts of confusion on the part of teachers relating to not only the merit component but also the requirements and procedures for the extra responsibility components.

Rural District

This was a small district (3 schools; 75 teachers, 1700 students) located in a small farming community approximately one hour from several major urban centers. Though isolated geographically, the community and district had access to these urban areas and the career ladder plan was shaped by input from two institutions of higher education.

The planning process was characterized by high teacher involvement through active participation by the local arm of the state's professional education association. The plan that was developed was multi-faceted and included extra responsibilities including mentoring, curriculum and instruction projects, and a career ladder steering committee which was responsible for the implementation of the plan. In addition a superior performance component asked candidates to provide evidence from three of the following four areas: principal evaluation, peer evaluation, student reports, and parent evaluation. Participation in this component of the plan was highest at the elementary level and lowest at the high school level.

Teacher reactions to the system could best be characterized as ambivalent. The teachers were positive towards the idea of extended responsibility but were critical of selection procedures within their district. The teachers were negative to the concept of superior performance and felt that the career ladder system had had a negative effect on

professional relations in the district. Teachers felt that these strains on professional relationships were especially sensitive between participants and non-participants in the system.

Fifty-six teachers completed a thirty-three item questionnaire regarding their district's career ladder system. Teachers did not view the career ladder system as being instrumental in promoting good teaching in the district nor did they view teaching as more rewarding due to career ladders. Even though they felt that the system was discouraging cooperation among teachers they did not wish to scrap the system after only one trial year.

Suburban District

This district was one of the largest districts in the state with one of the fastest growing student populations. The district has approximately 65 schools staffed by over 2700 teachers. Three schools within the district were allowed to generate and implement pilot career ladder plans. These pilot schools were the focus of our study.

Pilot Elementary School. In this school, an intermediate size elementary, the decision was made to focus the career ladder program on contracted extra responsibilities aimed at school related goals. These goals were arrived at through a Delphi technique which included both parents and teachers as respondents and the goals established then served as general foci for individual teacher projects.

These six goals consisted of the following: 1) development of students' self-esteem, 2) characteristics which assist students in learning, 3) development of strong reading, math, and language arts programs, 4) development of motivating learning environment, 5) problem-solving and higher level thinking skills, and 6) adapting to meet learning needs of students.

These projects were initially reviewed by a team consisting of the principal and teachers and were subsequently monitored by a mid-year conference with the principal.

Responses from 14 interviews revealed this program to be one of the most highly accepted from a teacher's perspective. The teachers felt very comfortable with the six criteria, easily working these into their existing curriculum. They viewed the evaluative sessions as helpful and supportive and felt comfortable with the central role that the principal played in the evaluation process. In addition, teachers felt well informed about the whole process and how it worked. Most teachers felt that at the time of interviews, which were done two months prior to the end of the evaluation, that they would receive all or most of the career ladder funds they had applied for.

Responses from 26 questionnaires revealed a similar positive teacher response to the system. Teachers wanted to continue what they viewed as an effective program. They did not view the program as discouraging cooperation between teachers nor did they see any negative affects on principal/teacher relations. However the teachers were less sure whether the program improved instruction or made teaching more rewarding (See Appendix B).

Pilot Middle School. This school was an intermediate sized (60 teachers) school in a suburban rural setting. The planning for the system was characterized by high teacher involvement with a good deal of administrative leadership. The developed plan centered on a point system focusing on three major areas. School goals consisted of 10 percent of the total points and focused on the general improvement of school discipline as judged by the administration, and progress in the basic skills area with 7 months progress on a standardized test being the criteria.

The second component of the plan, consisting of 30% of the total points, focused on administrator evaluation of teaching. The principal and vice-principal observed each participating teacher six times per year with a Likert-format scale focusing on five areas: 1) instructional skills, 2) organizational and management skills, 3) relations with students, 4) relations with other professionals and parents, and, 5) personal characteristics.

The third component of the plan, consisting of 60% of the total points focused on individual or team goals. These were designed by individuals or groups of teachers, with point values negotiated with the principal and monitored quarterly by an administrative meeting. Administrator evaluation at the end of the school year determined the final point values.

Interviews with 14 teachers in the school revealed tolerance for and acceptance of the system. One general impression from the interviews was that teachers realized that this was a pilot year and problems needed to be accepted and worked through. They expressed high acceptance of the central role of the administration in the evaluation process, but some did suggest broadening the process to include peer participation. The time involved in participating in the program was not seen as a major obstacle.

Questionnaire responses from 34 teachers in this school corroborated the teacher support uncovered in the interviews. They felt that the program did encourage improvement in teaching but were not quite sure if the program had improved instruction. They expressed mild support for the program as being effective but felt neutral as to whether negative feelings generated by the plan had disappeared and whether the program had made teaching more rewarding.

Pilot High School. In the pilot high school an overriding principle which influenced the shape of the plan was the belief that exemplary teaching

should be rewarded without any additional responsibilities being necessary. Accordingly a teacher-dominated planning committee with high administrative support generated a system in which teams of 2 peers and one administrator evaluated all eligible applicants. This was done through the use of a Likert-type evaluation form focusing on instructional behaviors. Scores on this form were then translated into monetary increases through a formula which allocated X dollars to Level 3 teachers who had a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience. Level 4 teachers received 2X dollars, had a minimum of 5 years experience, a bachelor's degree plus 45 hours of graduate work, and were willing to work with student teachers and serve as peer evaluators. Level 5 teachers received 2.5 X dollars, had a minimum of 10 years of experience, plus a master's degree or 60 hours of graduate work, were willing to work with student teachers, serve as a peer evaluator, and serve as a department chair or curriculum coordinator.

Interview data from twelve teachers revealed generally high acceptance of the program. Teachers seemed to accept the system itself as well as the way it was implemented. They accepted the differential pay for different levels and thought the evaluation process was fair. In addition, they accepted their roles as peer evaluators and felt that the evaluation process either had no effect or a positive one on peer relationships.

Questionnaire data from teachers revealed that teachers felt it was an effective program that benefitted students. They didn't perceive any negative affects on the principal-teacher relationship and felt that the program encouraged improvements in teaching.

Cross Site Analysis

Before we attempt to analyze and integrate the results from the case studies it would be helpful to pause for a moment, distance ourselves from the data, and place the concept of career ladders in clearer perspective. The call for career ladders came out of a larger national movement to improve schools (Education Commission of the States, 1983). The logic was simple; teachers influence learning, so one way to improve learning in the schools was to improve the quality of teachers. This could be done through the retention of superior teachers, the attraction of higher quality teachers and also through the improvement of working conditions for teachers.

This linkage between career ladders and teachers is an important one conceptually and methodologically for this study. Conceptually, career ladders should be viewed as a means towards an end. The desired end is improved learning in our schools. Teachers provide the necessary linkage between the time, energy and money invested in career ladders and the desired outcome, improved schools. The centrality of the teacher in this change process should be remembered as we discuss our data.

The centrality of the teacher in the career ladder--improved school schools argument also has methodological implications as well. If career ladders are to have their desired effect on teaching/learning in the classroom, the central role of the teacher as an intervening variable should be addressed. In this study we have focused on the attitudes and beliefs of teachers impacted by six different career ladder plans. The limitations of this type of research approach will be addressed subsequently, but the strengths of this approach should be noted. Central to any research on career ladders in education should be the question, "How are career ladders affecting

the attitudes, beliefs and work conditions of teachers?" To ignore this issue is to ignore the central role that teachers play in the career ladder/school improvement argument.

Having said this, several cautions concerning the present research should be made. The first involves long term versus short term effects. No proponent of career ladders has promised immediate, short term gains as a result of career ladders. The positive effects of career ladders will be felt, if felt at all, over a long period of time. Accordingly, research results which focus on the short term effects of career ladders should be viewed cautiously.

In a similar way, the attitudes and beliefs of teachers should not be viewed as fixed or constant entities. These attitudes and beliefs are the result of past experiences and if these experiences have not included contact with such factors such as differentiated responsibilities, incentive pay and intensive evaluation, teachers' feelings may be negative or neutral. One criterion that could be used in judging the effectiveness of initial career ladder efforts is the extent to which those efforts accommodate and attempt to change teacher belief structures.

This latter point underscores an important philosophical starting point for our research. If teaching is to develop as a true profession then teachers must be equipped to understand and deal with complex professional issues. Research in teacher evaluation (Kauchak, Peterson & Driscoll, 1985), as well as career ladders (Murphy & Hart, 1985), has indicated the need for development efforts in this area.

Finally, the exploratory nature of the research should be noted. The case studies were conducted in four districts in a relatively small state,

population wise, in what some might argue is a non-representative state. In addition, the research was conducted during the completion of the first year of career ladders, when teacher attitudes and beliefs were changing and being formed. As such, the case studies can be thought of as snap shots of what existed at the time of the study. Accordingly, these findings should be treated as tentative and hopefully generative of future research on career ladders.

With these thoughts in mind let's turn to the results of our cross district analysis.

Results

One of the most striking findings was the dramatic differences between districts in teacher involvement in the planning and implementation process and the concomitant effect this appeared to have on teachers' acceptance of the plans. In general, when involvement was high, teacher acceptance of the plan was high and when involvement was low, acceptance was low.

First, what are some examples of high teacher involvement? In all three of the pilot schools teacher input was actively sought in the design and implementation of the plan. At the pilot high school, teachers elected representatives to the planning committee and served on the peer evaluation committees. At the elementary school, teachers had a non-majority representation on the planning committee and served as peer revievers in the evaluation of teacher goals. At the pilot middle school, teachers served on the planning committee and conscious efforts were made during the planning process to involve all faculty in a two-way dialogue about the content and procedures of the plan.

At the other end of the spectrum, we see a relative lack of involvement by teachers in Urban District in the planning and implementation of the plan. Teachers constituted a definite minority on the planning committee and had little input in the design and implementation of the plan. Top down is probably as accurate a term as any to characterize this approach. it is interesting to note that some of the most negative feelings towards career ladders existed in this district.

This finding should not come as a surprise to those who have investigated the effectiveness of organizations. Participative decision making has been found to positively influence productivity in industry (Hauck, 1979). In education a series of studies showed teacher morale to be directly related to participation in decision making (National Education Association, 1964). In a study of acceptance of new practices in education researches found teachers' sense of ownership of new projects related to the degree they were involved in decisions about the project (McLaughlin and March, 1978). Finally, in a study of effective teacher evaluation practices teacher involvement and responsibility was found to be a crucial component of effective systems (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin and Bernstein, 1984).

The effectiveness of communication channels was another variable which appeared linked to teacher acceptance. Where communication efforts were successful, as evidenced by high teacher understanding of the plan, acceptance also tended to be high. The opposite was also true; confusion and lack of understanding was generally associated with negative attitudes.

Several factors may be involved here. Scale was definitely a factor; the larger the educational unit, the larger the task for career ladder plans to disseminate plan characteristics. This problem was evident in Tennessee's

career ladder plan (Toch, 1984; Update, 1985). In our study, the size of the institutions varied from one district with 11,635 students and 535 teachers to one pilot school with 586 students and 25 teachers. Clearly the communication problems involved in a large district were more complex than those in a smaller district or one school.

However, size alone was not the only factor involved. Pockets of confusion were uncovered in both Rural and Snow districts with 93 and 61 teachers respectively, whereas this problem was not evident at the pilot middle and high schools which had faculties of 54 and 80 respectively.

Two factors affecting the communication problem may be involved in the career ladder systems we studied. One is the complexity of the career ladder system. As a career ladder system becomes more complex, communication problems increase. This may have been a factor in Snow District which asked teachers to provide their own initiative in compiling a multi-line dossier system. By comparison, the pilot schools appeared to have more clearly understood systems (at least from a participant perspective). These systems required teachers to do what they always did, i.e., teach and be observed by a peer or administrators. This was the case in the pilot middle and high schools. In the pilot elementary school individual conferences were used to define and clarify how teacher projects would meet school goals.

The other factor present in the pilot middle school was a planned communication network in which each member of the planning committee was assigned specific other teachers as part of his or her communication responsibilities. This assignment involved both dissemination of information from the planning committee and carrying feedback from individual teachers

back to the planning committee. The success of this planned communication effort warrants further research.

Another aspect of communication was planned inservice programs for teacher participants. In both Snow and Rural districts these inservice efforts were viewed positively by teachers, who felt that the information gained was helpful in shaping and understanding career ladder features.

In addition to teacher involvement and effective communication efforts, another variable positively related to teacher acceptance was administrative involvement. The nature of the administrative involvement appeared crucial. Democratic, supportive and interactive principals were a prominent feature at each of the pilot schools. Supportive and facilitating superintendents' involvement was positively noted in both Rural and Snow Districts. Interestingly, heavy building level principal involvement was not found in these districts. In Urban District the involvement of the building level principals was more perfunctory. They were to serve as evaluators and didn't appear to take a major role in helping teachers understand or modify the career ladder plan. The centrality of the building level administrators in shaping teacher acceptance of career ladder features has been noted in a national study of innovations (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978) and in another study of Utah career ladders (Hart, 1985).

Another variable which surfaced in our data was the shape of the career ladder pyramid or the presence or absence of quotas. The most positive response from teachers came from the three pilot school sites where virtually all teachers were eligible (and coincidentally expected to received career ladder funds), and the most negative reactions came from Urban District where fixed quotas were in place. It should be noted, however, that the absence of

quotas does not in itself guarantee teacher acceptance as we saw in Snow District, which had no quotas.

Two other factors which surfaced in the analysis of the data were problems with the evaluation process and the need for flexibility in the design of career ladder systems. In terms of evaluation problems, respondents from both Rural and Snow districts identified increased time and energy expended as a result of career ladder programs as a major problem in their districts. Respondents in these districts questioned whether the time and energy being expended would result in increased learning for their students. Here the distinction between job enlargement and performance recognition seems relevant.

Job enlargement involves redefining the teacher's role to include other responsibilities such as curriculum development, mentoring and area coordination (Murphy & Hart, 1983). Performance recognition involves rewarding teachers for their performance in their teaching and does not require additional responsibilities. The negative comments about increased amounts of time were both related to documentation efforts for performance recognition. It may be that teachers do not accept the documentation task as a valid one for teachers. Here the amount of time involved appears to be a critical issue.

In terms of flexibility, it appeared positively related to teacher acceptance. To the extent that career ladders were able to accommodate the considerable diversity found within a system the better the career ladder plan was received by teachers. This finding was not as strongly supported as some of the others but the data is suggestive in this direction. At the positive end of the spectrum, in both the pilot elementary and middle schools, teachers

were permitted to design projects for their individual classrooms. The only negative consent about this component of these schools' career ladder plans occurred when resource teachers had problems fitting into the general guidelines. Within Rural District the flexibility of the job enlargement component was also viewed favorably by teachers.

However, three counter cases also surfaced. At both the pilot middle and high schools teachers encountered uniform evaluation systems, and had no major complaints about these systems. In addition, in Snow District teachers had considerable latitude in the design of their dossiers, yet sentiment toward the system was negative to mixed. Perhaps flexibility is important only when job enlargement is the issue.

Summary and Discussion

The most surprising finding was one that didn't occur. When we began our study we were predisposed to look for structural features of plans that were related to teacher acceptance. This notion, or hypothesis, if you will, was generated by previous research in teacher evaluation in which we found clear differences in teachers' acceptance of various teacher evaluation procedures (Kauchak, Peterson & Driscoll, 1985). Accordingly we investigated career ladder systems that had different structural features, assuming that these would be related to teacher acceptance. This did not occur.

For example, the type of evaluation system employed did not appear crucial. Teachers in the pilot middle school reacted positively to administrator evaluation while teachers in Urban district reacted negatively. Our research failed to uncover any substantive differences in the focus, frequency, or length of the administrative visits in the two districts. Peer evaluation was another structural variable which did not appear related to

teacher acceptance. Teachers were involved in classroom visits in the pilot middle school with positive reactions, while teachers were involved in the evaluation of teacher dossiers in Snow District with mixed to negative teacher acceptance.

In a similar way, the difference between job enlargement and performance recognition did not surface as a differentiating structural feature. We found three sites (Snow, Urban and Rural) with negative teacher reactions to performance recognition features of their system and two (pilot middle and pilot high school) with positive teacher reactions to this component. In terms of job enlargement we found two sites (pilot elementary, pilot middle) with positive reactions to job enlargement and two sites (Urban and Rural Districts) with mixed reactions to this component of their plan.

Recommendations

From a practical or applied perspective, the present research has several implications for the design and implementation of these systems. The first is that teachers should be integrally involved in the design and implementation of these systems. This might seem obvious when we consider that the central focus of career ladder impact is aimed at teachers themselves, but this point has eluded career ladder developers in this state as well as those in others (Toch, 1984).

A second recommendation is for the development of planned inservice and communication efforts. Teacher attitudes and beliefs should not be viewed as fixed or static entities. Inservice efforts should be used to expand teacher understandings of the issues involved. In addition, systematic communication efforts should be used to promote two-way communication of ideas.

In the design of the career ladder, consideration should be given to the complexity of the system, and the time and energy demands it places on participants. The more complex the system the harder it is for teachers to understand and participate in the system. Also, participation in the system should not pull teachers away from their primary focus which is teaching (Lortie, 1975). This appears to be especially problematic when the focus of the system is performance recognition and teachers are asked to expend considerable time and effort in documenting good teaching.

Flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of the total teaching population should also be a consideration in the design of a career ladder system. An implicit theme which surfaced in a large number of our interviews were the problems encountered by teachers in diverse settings with distinct assignments. This problem surfaced with special education teachers, vocational education teachers, physical education teachers and even "regular" teachers at different grade levels. The measurement problems involved in documenting good teaching were central here.

One final recommendation can be offered, relating to scale and local autonomy. Given the positive findings in the pilot schools that we investigated, the positive results in other states with small scale projects (Natriello and Cohn, 1985; Burke, 1982; Schlecty, Joslin, Leak & Hanes, 1985) and the initial negative results in large scale state projects (Toch, 1984; Olson, 1986) we wonder about the advisability of large scale, monolithic carer ladder plans. Our findings, plus the findings of others seem to suggest the advisability of small scale projects with local control and autonomy.

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Appendix A

Pilot School Questionnaire

Section I.

1. Below are listed statements about your school's career ladder program. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement by writing a number from the following scale in front of the statement.

1=strong agree	2=somewhat agree	3=neutral	4=somewhat disagree	5=strongly disagree

1. _____ The school level career ladder program is very effective in encouraging and rewarding good teaching.

2. _____ The school level career ladder program discourages teachers from working together.

3. _____ The Career Ladder program has helped the relationship between teachers and principals.

4. _____ I have no idea what the career ladder teachers are doing in my school for the extra money they are receiving.

5. _____ I feel teaching is more rewarding because of the Career Ladder Program.

6. _____ Almost all of the negative feelings generated by the Career Ladder Program have gone away by now.

7. _____ The Career Ladder program has hurt the relationship between teacher and principals.

8. _____ The Career Ladder program gives recognition and money to good teachers who deserve it.

9. _____ Teachers are paying more attention to things that will not have any benefits for students because of the Career Lader program.

10. _____ Hot enough money is provided to adequately fund the Career Ladder Program.

11. _____ I am seriously thinking about leaving teaching altogether because of the Career Ladder program.

12. _____ Our school level career ladder program encourages educational improvements.

13. _____ My classroom instruction has improved because of the Career Ladder Program.

14. _____ Continue our school's program as it now exists.

15. _____ Continue our school's program, but only with major changes.

16. _____ Terminate our school's program. It cannot be rehabilitated.

Section II.

1. At the beginning of the 1984-85 school year, how many years of continuous service did you have in the district.

   _____ years

2. What is your position in the school?

   _____Full-time teacher

   _____Full-time counselor, media coordinator, or other non-classroom certificated position

   _____Part-time teacher/part-time counselor, media coordinators, etc., but working full-time in one school.

   _____Part-time teacher

   _____Part-time counselor, media coordinator, etc.

3. What is your sex?

   _____Male

   _____Female

4. What do you feel is the most positive aspect of your school's career ladder plan?

5. What do you feel is the most negative aspect of your school's career ladder plan?

6. What suggestion(s) do you have to improve your school's plan? (Use the back if necessary).

Appendix B

District and School Level Questionnaire Responses

Item	Snow		Rural		Pilot Elementary School		Pilot Middle School		Pilot High School School	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
1. Effective Program	3.68	5.72	3.52	1.22	1.35	.745	2.21	1.25	2.02	1.02
2. Discourages Coop	2.24	1.08	2.34	1.17	4.77	.710	3.82	1.38	4.19	1.07
3. Helped Relations w/ Teachers & Principals	3.89	.935	3.91	.959	----	----	2.47	1.19	2.06	.893
4. No Idea	3.34	1.62	3.75	1.43	2.53	1.24	2.91	1.36	2.55	1.14
5. More Rewarding	4.13	1.30	3.75	1.43	2.54	1.24	2.91	1.36	2.55	1.14
6. Negative Feelings	4.66	.878	----	----	1.88	1.30	3.50	1.26	2.85	1.37
7. Hurt Relations w/ Teach. & Principals	2.78	1.04	2.50	1.19	4.92	.391	3.68	1.22	4.48	.68
8. Deserved Relog.	3.53	1.31	3.52	1.34	1.69	1.01	2.59	1.35	2.17	1.11
9. Not Benefit Stud.	1.95	1.11	3.07	1.20	4.12	1.28	3.62	1.28	4.02	.85
10. Not Enough Funds	2.70	1.22	2.00	1.13	1.69	.788	1.65	1.04	2.09	.97
11. Leave Teaching	3.71	1.29	4.02	1.14	----	----	3.79	1.30	4.54	1.03
12. Encourage Imp.	3.55	1.41	3.43	1.29	1.31	.549	1.74	.898	1.90	.86
13. Imp. Instr.	4.29	1.11	3.62	1.30	2.50	1.10	2.77	1.42	2.47	.85
14. Continue As Is	4.11	1.20	2.98	1.19	1.36	.757	1.58	.902	2.46	1.03
15. Continue Change	2.84	1.37	3.14	1.31	4.54	.989	3.87	1.18	----	----
16. Terminate	3.11	1.60	4.23	1.05	5.00	.000	4.61	.788	----	----

1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Somewhat Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Somewhat Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree